

Paul Signac

(1863-1935)

Constantinople. Yeni Djami

(Constantinople. Yeni Djami)

1909

signed and dated bottom left

'P. Signac 1909'

Oil on canvas

h. 66,0 cm x b. 81,5 cm

Kunstsammlung NRW, KIL 0221

WRM Dep. 970





Brief Report

In the early years of the twentieth century Paul Signac visited some of Europe's major ports, including Marseille, Venice, Rotterdam, London, La Rochelle, and, in 1907, Constantinople, today's Istanbul. While there, he assembled his pictorial impressions in drawings and watercolours, some of which he later transferred to canvas in the studio, using his divisionist technique. The painting discussed here bears the title 'Stamboul, Yeni Djami', which together with his signature and the date 1909 he inscribed on the reverse of the stretcher. It was painted on the basis of a watercolour study which already depicts precisely the motif of the picture (fig. 13). Signac executed his painting on a commercially available canvas with a cream-white ground in the standard landscape format 'Figure 25', which, according to a label *verso*, he bought from the art supplies shop Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet in Paris (fig. 2). In order to lend his depiction the greatest-possible luminescence, he added a pure white ground, a measure he had already recommended in his treatise 'D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme': 'It is curious to note how, even in the smallest details of their techniques, the Neo-Impressionists have put Delacroix's advice into practice. For instance, they only paint on white grounds so that the light will reflect through the colours, giving them more brilliance and life.' (Vitaglione 1985, p. T18; Signac 1899, p. 18; fig. 9).

Part of the scene, such as the mosque and the sailing boat on the left-hand edge, and the rowing boat in the foreground, were drawn by the artist on the ground in pencil along with the line of the horizon (figs. 7, 8). The subsequent paint application, using the Divisionist technique, follows this underdrawing exactly; no further changes were made to the composition. With a regular rhythm, the individual colour strokes are placed next to each other, only partly overlapping, leaving gaps through which the white ground and also sections of the underdrawing remain visible. The direction of application of the impasto colour strokes – which, in line with the Neo-Impressionist colour theory were blended only with white and with the neighbouring colours in the spectrum – follows the motif in question (fig. 10). Fortunately the painting has never been varnished and thus retains the authentic matt surface character as intended by the artist.



Picture support canvas

Standard format	Figure 25 (81 x 65 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characterization	20 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; even weave with slight irregularities in the thickness of the threads; weave error with excessive tension bottom right suggest the weft threads run horizontally; no selvage present
Stretching	original stretching with original nails; the intervals between the fastening points range from 7,5 to 11,5 cm (average 10 cm); four small holes through the paint/ground layer and canvas can be seen in all four corners <i>recto</i> and may indicate an interim stretching or the use of spacers (fig. 11)
Stretcher/strainer	original stretcher with vertical centre bar, softwood, mortise-and-tenon joints, the bars of the stretcher are bevelled towards the inside; breadth of bars: 5,5 cm
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.2 cm
Traces left by manufacture processing	the canvas was cut largely along the line of the threads, and is about 5.5 cm higher and about 6.5 cm broader than the stretcher itself; the cut of the primed canvas was marked out in pencil in advance; the primed canvas is folded over as far as the reverse of the stretcher and here stuck down with brown paper
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	a label with a stamped number in the middle of the top bar of the stretcher reads: 'LUCIEN LEFEBVRE-FOINET / 19, rue Vavin et 2, rue Bréa, PARIS VI ^E / COULEURS ET TOILES FINES', H 45 x B 73 mm (fig. 2)



Ground

Sizing	unclear
Colour	first ground: white with a yellowish-cream tinge; second ground: white (fig. 9)
Application	1) the first ground consists of a single layer applied before the canvas was cut and stretched; the application is smooth and even without visible traces left by tools (commercial ground); 2) the second ground is a thin single layer applied after the canvas was cut and stretched; this ground is confined to the painted area (presumably applied by the artist)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	both grounds are thin enough to reveal the structure of the canvas; the layers are microscopically homogeneous with no discernible pigmentation

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	graphite or lead-pencil drawing is extensively visible in the infrared reflectogram, and in the areas not covered by paint even with the naked eye
Extent/character	detailed and sketchy freehand drawing of the outlines of the mosque, the line of the horizon and the sailing boat at the left-hand edge; the sailing boats in the right-hand half of the picture show no discernible underdrawing while that of the rowing boat in the foreground consists of only a few lines; the strokes vary in width and blackness from soft and broad, covering only the elevations of the canvas, to very fine
Pentimenti	none



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

systematic divisionist paint application using short strokes largely measuring app. 6 x 10 mm, their orientation following that of the motif in question; some strokes were applied wet-in-wet, others wet-on-dry; the white ground co-determines the generally pale coloration of the picture as it is visible between the individual brushstrokes in the sense of an underpainting; the colours are often not well mixed on the palette, but only in the individual brushstroke; all the colours are blended either with white or with the neighbouring colours in the spectrum (fig. 10)

Painting tools

flat bristle brushes; breadth of stroke largely 5–8 mm

Surface structure

the varying orientations of the relief-like impasto brushstrokes generate a lively surface structure; increasingly impasto as proportion of white increases; the ground remains prominent between the brushstrokes

Palette

colours attested by microscopic observation: white with brownish-pink UV fluorescence (presumably lead white); white with pale yellowish-green UV fluorescence (presumably zinc white, fig. 7), pale yellow; medium yellow; medium orange; pink lake (with characteristic pale orange-to-pink UV fluorescence); medium red; red lake (with characteristic pale red UV fluorescence); pale blue; medium blue; dark blue; purple; medium green; (with characteristic pale-green UV fluorescence); dark green

Binding medium

presumably oil



Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

in original unvarnished state; the surface texture varies between matt and mildly glossy according to the density of the paint applied and thickness of the respective layer

Signature/Mark

When?

applied with a brush using thin dark-green paint on the completely dry paint layer following completion of the painting (fig. 12)

Autograph signature

in its orientation and letter formation, the signature matches Signac's signatures at this period

Frame

Originality

not original

State of preservation

Fine aging cracks, and spiral crack; two small tears in the canvas along the top edge; canvas overall displays slight corrugation with a few clear traces of applied pressure and marking derived from the centre bar of the stretcher; some impasto areas are mildly compressed with dark surface deposit; individual minimal losses in the ground and paint layers; a few detailed retouches of losses (cf. IR and UV); canvas shows stain formation verso from (presumably) an early attempt to clean the surface of the painting using an aqueous medium.

Further remarks

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Literature

- Cachin 2001: Françoise Cachin/Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, Signac. Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint, Paris 2000, p. 295, cat. and fig. no. 484
- Vitaglione 1985: Heather Buckner Vitaglione, P. Signac's „D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme“: a translation and commentary, Thesis University of St. Andrews, 1985, <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/13241> (Original Source: Paul Signac, D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme, Paris 1899)

Source of illustrations

Abb. 1-12: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud

Abb. 13: Paul Signac, Constantinople. Yeni Djami, c. 1909, watercolour, pencil and Indian ink, on paper, 20.8 x 25.7 cm (private collection)

Examination methods used

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| v Incident light | - VIS spectrometry |
| v Raking light | - Wood identification |
| v Reflected light | - FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy) |
| v Transmitted light | - EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis) |
| v Ultraviolet fluorescence | - Microchemical analysis |
| v Infrared reflectography | |
| v False-colour infrared reflectography | |
| - X-ray | |
| v Stereomicroscopy | |

Author of examination: Caroline von Saint-George

Date: 03/2018

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Date: 04/2019



Abb. 1
Recto



Abb. 2
Verso with dealer's label



Abb. 3
Raking light

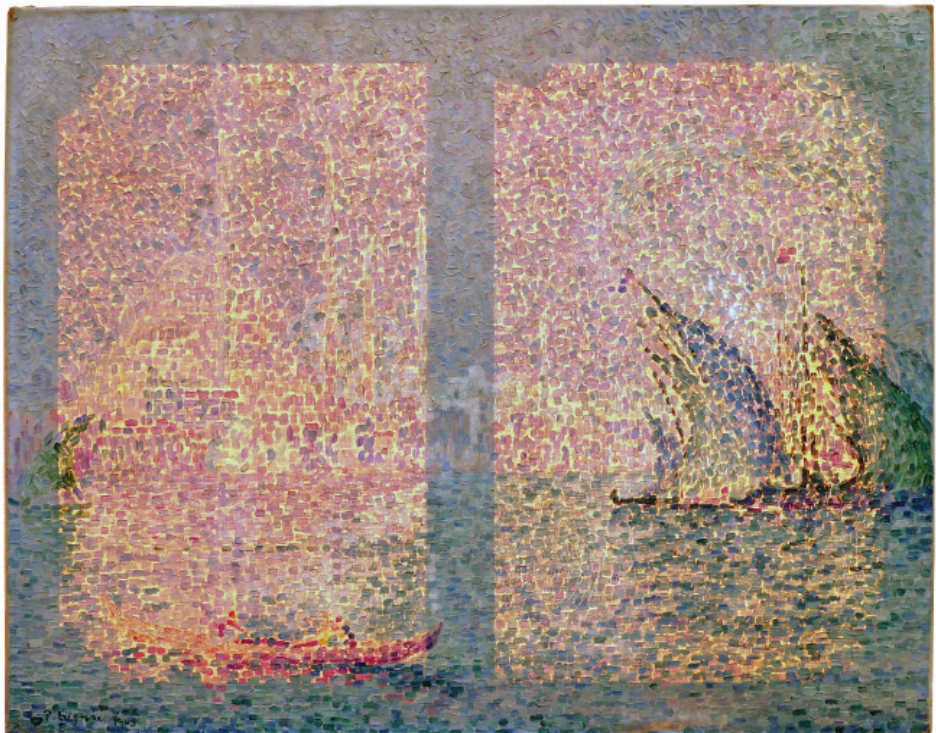


Abb. 4
Transmitted light

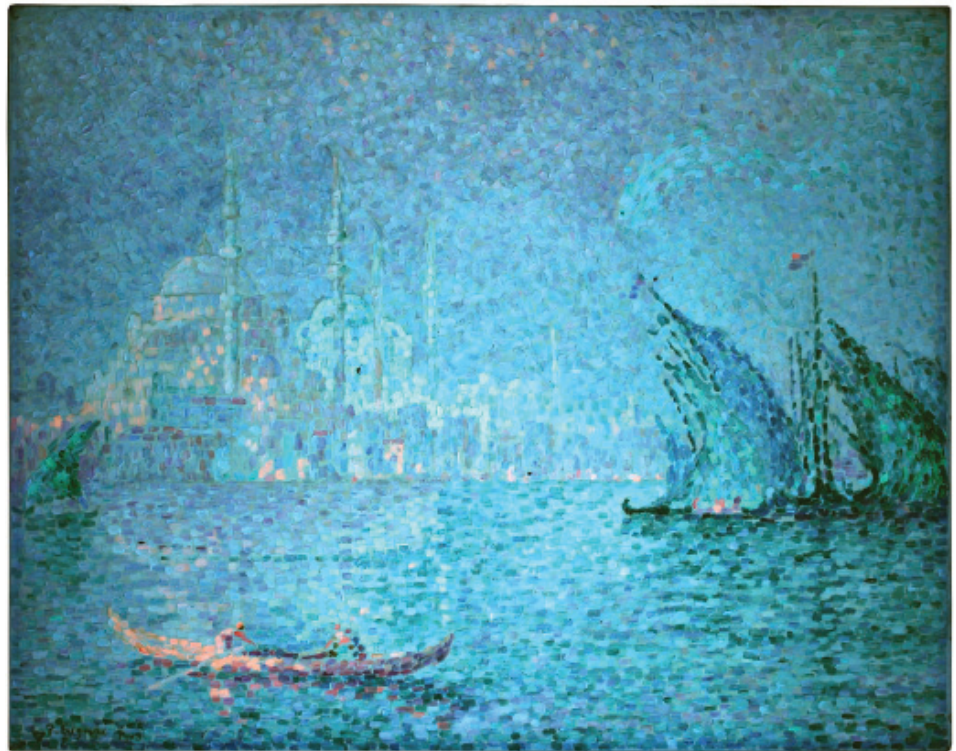


Abb. 5
UV fluorescence



Abb. 6
Infrared reflectogram



Abb. 7
Detail in UV (top) and
incident light (bottom)
with white paint applica-
tions of varying UV fluo-
rescence, which indicate
the use of two different
white pigments, presu-
mably lead white and
zinc white



Abb. 8
Detail of mosque,
pencil underdrawing



Abb. 9
Detail of top edge, pure
white ground applica-
tion over the off-white
ground applied by the
manufacturer

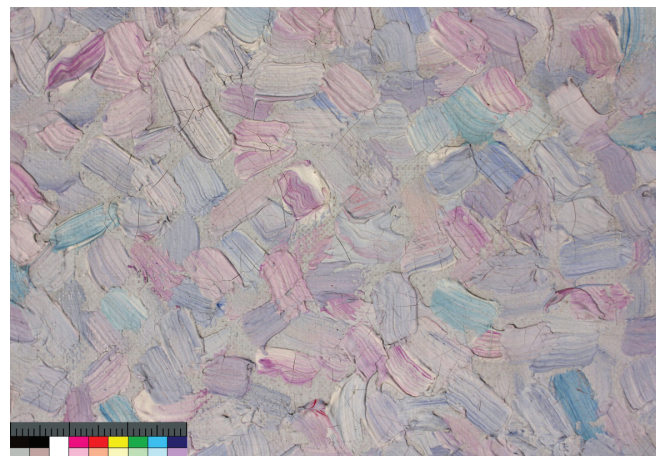


Abb. 10
Details of the sky (top)
and surface of the water
(bottom), with different
orientation of applica-
tion and in places blen-
ding of the paints on the
canvas itself





Paul Signac – Constantinople
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Abb. 11
Details of the four
corners of the picture
with holes that suggest
an interim fixing of the
canvas



Abb. 12
Detail of signature
and date



Abb. 13
Paul Signac, Constantinople. Yeni Djami, c. 1909, watercolour, pencil and Indian ink, on paper, 20.8 x 25.7 cm (private collection)

